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INFO RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 4146
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 0358
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 4761
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0624
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 0234
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0643
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 4350
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2642
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0663
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1299
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1919
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 000794

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: LARGE EXPLOSIONS REPORTED IN TOWN NEAR
BUKHARA

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

11. (SBU) Several Embassy contacts reported a series of explosions occurring in or near the town of Kagan, about 15 kilometers away from Bukhara, during the early morning of July 10. Preliminary reports are sketchy, but it appears that some type of accident occurred at an army depot used to store old ammunition, rather than any type of terrorist attack. We continue to gather information on the possible causes of this incident. Some have reported a large number of casualties and that Kagan has been sealed off by Uzbek authorities. Thus far, nothing has been reported in the state-controlled media. Below is a collection of the reports we have received so far, and we will provide additional information as soon as it becomes available.

EXPLOSIONS REPORTED AT ARMY DEPOT IN KAGAN

12. (C) Free Farmers opposition party leader Nigara Khidoyatova reported talking with unnamed contacts in Bukhara, who told her that there was a large explosion at the "Northern Region" ("Ceverni Okrug") army munitions depot in the town of Kagan at 1:20 am on July 10. According to Khidoyatova's contacts, the explosion caused extensive damage in Kagan (Note: Kagan is about 15 km from Bukhara, and it is where the main Bukhara train station is located. End note.) The contacts reported a large but unknown number of casualties and that the town has been closed by Uzbek authorities. The contacts further reported that the initial explosion at the army depot also caused a nearby oil storage facility to ignite. The contacts said that the flame was visible for about 35 kilometers away and that explosions from Kagan were heard throughout the night in Bukhara itself. Khidoyatova did not believe that the explosion was the result of a terrorist attack, but thought it was due to an accident at the depot.

KAGAN REPORTEDLY CLOSED; LARGE NUMBER OF CASULTIES REPORTED

¶3. (C) The Israeli Ambassador reported to the Ambassador talking to sources in Bukhara's Jewish community, who reported major explosions in the vicinity of an army camp near Kagan on July 10. According to the contacts, the hospitals "are full of casualties" and civilians are being "evacuated" from Kagan to Bukhara. The contacts also reported that Kagan was "closed."

¶4. (C) A press contact of the Public Affairs section reported that Kagan has two munitions depots, and that the explosion occurred at the smaller depot shortly after midnight. The contact reported that the explosion caused significant damage and a large but unknown number of casualties. The contact said that a fire was still burning at the depot, the heat of which made it difficult to approach the town. The contact added that the munitions base was well-guarded by Uzbek military personnel, and that it was unlikely that someone could infiltrate the depot.

EXPLOSIONS VISIBLE FROM BUKHARA

¶5. (C) A Public Affairs exchange program alumnus who lives in Bukhara reported that the explosions in Kagan were visible in Bukhara, and could be heard continuously from about 2 am to 5 am on July 10. The contact said that much of Bukhara's population were out on the street watching the explosions. He added that Kagan appeared to be closed by Uzbek authorities.

¶6. (C) A member of the Embassy's local guard force reported receiving a 5 am phone call from his ex-spouse who lives in Bukhara. The ex-spouse reported that the explosions began at the army depot in Kagan city at about 2 am and had caused windows to shatter in the buildings near where the ex-spouse lived. The ex-spouse also reported not being able to get in contact via telephone with relatives who lived in Kagan.

LOCAL POLICE REPORT "VIOLATION OF FIRE SAFETY REGULATIONS"

¶7. (C) Regional Security Office investigators contacted local police authorities on the morning of July 10 and were told that the explosions were not related to terrorist or criminal activities. Rather, they were informed it was due to "a violation of fire safety regulations."

CONTACT REPORTS EXPLOSION IN KAGAN REGION, NOT KAGAN TOWN

¶8. (C) Bukhara-based human rights activist Shukhrat Ganiev reported that the explosion occurred not in Kagan itself, but at an old Soviet helicopter base located in a district of Kagan region called "Karoleyva" ("Queen"). He said that the helicopter base was used to store old Soviet ammunition from the Afghan war, and he believed an accident there caused the explosion.

NORLAND